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ABSTRACT

Continuing professional education has proven to be an acceptable control mechanism to assure professional competence. Officially recognized first under the Engineering, Science, Management War Training Act of World War II, the continuing education movement is still gaining attention in the United States with 16 professions in the 50 states requiring continuing education as proof of professional competency. At present, the question is whether continuing education of professionals should be mandatory or voluntary. The supposition that continuing professional education improves competence has led professionals, professional organizations, and governing bodies to the concept of mandatory continuing professional education (MCPE). Arguments for MCPE include the tremendous knowledge explosion, consumer demand for competency and accountability, increased number and quality of continuing education offerings, and professionals' failure to engage in continuing education. Supporters of voluntary continuing professional education have expressed seven broad concerns related to the mandatory stance that deal with participant and teacher motivation, performance and competency, program relevance, costs and resources, work and family constraints, quality of educational offerings, and program content. The prevalent philosophy of adult educators is that continuing education is a voluntary, self-directed learning experience sought for personal development and social progress. (YLB)

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CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

> The lives of some men and women are structurally shaped by the fact that they are deeply versed in advanced and subtle bodies of knowledge, which they apply with dedication in solving complex practical problems. They learn by study, apprenticeship, and experience, both by expanding their comprehension of formal disciplines and by finding new ways to use them to achieve specific ends, constantly moving forward and backward from theory to practice so that each enriches the other. Such people protect one another and are sometimes extended special protection by society far beyond that granted to other citizens. The price of protection is vigilance against poor performance and unethical behavior, and that vigilance is exercised by the privileged person, by others of similar specialization, and by society. These people are called professionals. (Houle, 1980, p. 1)

Conscientious professionals have always believed that continuing education was necessary to maintain competence in a profession. This responsibility was considered an individual obligation. By the 1960's, the increasing public awareness of inadequacies within professions along with criticism by members of the professions themselves forced a change in emphasis (Houle, 1980, p. 6). Education became the basis for continued practice of a profession.

As the public became more educated and increased their consumer awareness, they became more vocal in demanding protection and accountability from professionals. Licenses to practice were not automatically renewed. Professionals

were asked to demonstrate competence. Review mechanisms were tried but with limited success. Self policing, codes of practice, and legislation to protect the public have also been tried (Rockhill, 1981, p. 54). However, education has proved to be the most acceptable control mechanism for reviewing professional competence.

Houle (1976) identified eight purposes of continuing professional education:

1. To keep up with the new knowledge required to perform responsibly in the choosen career.
2. To master new conceptions of the career itself.
3. To keep up with changes in the relevant basic disciplines.
4. To prepare for changes in a personal career line.
5. To maintain freshness of outlook on the work done, so that detail is not neglected.
6. To continue to grow as a well-rounded person.
7. To retain the power to learn.
8. To discharge effectively the social role imposed by membership in a profession. (pp. 46-49)

Continuing education to assure competence was also recommended by Rockhill (1981, pp. 55-62). She noted that certification or credentialing following an approved educational program determines who has the right to practice. Secondly, the concept of education has been broadened to include performance competence and technical expertise as well as an increased knowledge base. Finally, lacking adequate tools to measure performance competence, the professions have agreed that continuing education is a viable

alternative.

The issue facing continuing professional education cannot be fully evaluated unless the historical background of events influencing its development are analyzed. Although certification standards were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and indirectly contributed to the beginnings of continuing education, it was under the Engineering, Science, Management War Training Act of World War II that continuing education was officially recognized (Rockhill, 1981, p. 58). Professional groups and new specializations which emerged following World War II accelerated the demand for continuing education as a means of presenting proof of continued competence in a field. Although the movement toward continuing education proceeded during the following decades, continuing education was unorganized and without recognition until 1967 when the National Advisory Commission on Health Manpower recommended that regulating agencies establish guidelines to assist health professionals in maintaining continued competence (Rockhill, 1981, p. 60). By 1968, a National Task Force was created to study a uniform unit for the measurement and implementation of continuing education. In 1971, the Continuing Education Unit was approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and spread rapidly across the nation (Knowles, 1977). By 1974, there were 38 states requiring proof of continued professional development as a basis for relicensure of physicians. This along with the

institution of the Professional Standards Review Organization helped to erect continuing professional education as a standard of competence in this country.

Another landmark occurred in 1979. When the Supreme Court ruled in the Harrah Independent School District vs. Mary Jane Martin case that the school board could enforce continuing education requirements on its employees, it set a precedent for enforcement of mandatory continuing education requirements in the schools (Lisman, 1980, p. 125). At present, the continuing education movement is still gaining considerable attention in the United States with 16 professions in the 50 states requiring continuing education as proof of professional competency (Lisman, 1980, p. 125).

The need for continuing education is a prevalent topic encountered in current professional literature. The question at present is not concerning the value of continuing education for professionals but is whether continuing education should be on a mandatory or voluntary basis (Rockhill, 1981, pp. 52-70).

An impact study by Campbell and Gammache (1981) was directed toward the assumption that a relationship exists between participation in a continuing education program and improved professional practice. However they proposed that several small changes will occur before a significant change in professional performance is apparent. This theory was upheld in an 18 month Continuing Professional Education (CPE) program to improve management skills and knowledge of nurse

executives (pp. 28-30). The nurse executives demonstrated increases in knowledge, confidence, perspectives on work, problem-solving skills, and role.

Cervero (1982) also believed continuing professional education can improve professional performance. He proposed that the effectiveness of the CPE program is affected by the characteristics of the 1) CPE program; 2) individual profession; 3) proposed behavioral changes; and 4) social system in which the professional operates (p. 62). Cervero felt that when these variables are considered in planning continuing professional education programs, there is a possibility for change in the professional's performance.

The supposition that continuing professional education improves competence has led professionals, professional organizations, and governing bodies to the concept of mandatory continuing professional education (MCPE). When an individual becomes a member of a profession she/he should accept the responsibility of maintaining competence in that profession, but this is not always the case. Houle (1976) placed professionals "along a normal probability curve in terms of their readiness to innovate and adopt new practices" (p. 50). The "innovators" and "pacesetters" are at the upper end of the continuum while the "laggards" are at the lower end of the continuum. The middle section is the "majority adopters" or "middle majority" who comprise the largest number of professionals. Houle (1980) states that "too few professionals continue to learn throughout their lives, and

the opportunities provided to aid and encourage them to do so are far less abundant than they should be" (p. 303).

Rationale for mandatory continuing professional education are numerous and varied. The tremendous knowledge explosion in all the professions is often cited. Rockhill (1981, pp. 55-56) discusses the increasing demand by consumers for competency and accountability. Darkenwald (1982) states the "basic argument for compelling people to learn is that it is good for them and society" (p. 241).

Other proponents of MCPE utilize arguments that: 1)MCPE would increase the number and quality of continuing education offerings; 2)authorities may better know what professionals need than the professionals themselves; 3)professionals have failed to shoulder the responsibility for continuing education; 4)MCPE provides a mechanism to allow as well as insure that inactive professionals keep current; and 5)MCPE is less objectionable than periodic evaluation or re-examination for licensure or certification. Many authors argue that MCPE is not the answer to the problem of maintaining competency and improving proficiency (Rockhill, 1981; Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982; Lisman, 1980), but it is at least one effort in that direction.

Mattran (1981) notes that "it is not the fact of a mandate that is repulsive so much as the source from whence it comes" (p. 46). He poses the situation where "a group of people sharing a common identity accept a self-imposed mandate after deliberation and consensus" (p. 46), calling

this "an admirable form of self-discipline."

> If the mandate for continuing professional education derives from those who must live with the mandate and if certain conditions are met, it violates none of the principles of adult continuing education...It is, in fact, an act of educational volunteerism on the part of people with a common identity who wish somehow to improve practice within their ranks. (Mattran, 1981, p. 48)

Supporters of voluntary continuing professional education (VCPE) have expressed seven broad concerns related to the mandatory stance. These seven concerns deal with participant and teacher motivation, performance and competency, program relevance, costs and resources, work and family constraints, quality of educational offerings, and program content.

A major concern of those in favor of voluntary as opposed to mandatory continuing professional education relates to the question of motivation. Proponents of VCPE argue that this concern is not adequately addressed by those who favor mandatory requirements. Individuals may be forced to attend predetermined continuing education programs rather than selecting programs to meet their own learning needs, thus fostering rigidity and diminishing self-directed learning. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) address the issue of motivation by stating that "mandatory attendance at formal courses may even have the effect of discouraging the self-initiated and self-directed learning that for many professionals is more relevent to their needs..." (p. 242).

Cervero (1984) agrees with Darkenwald and Merriam on the importance of motivation to effective continuing professional education. He states that "the most well-planned program is not likely to change the behavior of individuals who, for example, are not motivated to change" (p. 136). In addition, Flaherty (1975) also recognizes the importance of motivation by ascribing to the well known principle that learning is more likely to take place and is more effective when the learner takes part in the learning process. It must be noted that the issue of motivation does not concern only the participants. Rockhill (1981) describes the effects of mandatory continuing professional education on the teacher's motivation. She believes teachers are less motivated since they have a captive clientele and do not have the challenge of devising appropriate educational experiences (p. 64).

A second major concern of opponents to mandatory continuing education deals with the issue of performance and competence. Proponents of MCPE such as Mattran (1981) believe that "this method of insuring the competence of professional practice is acknowledged..." (p. 48). On the other hand, those who favor VPCE challenge this position and argue that it is a misconception that education insures increased performance and competence. Lisman (1980) states that "research findings do not show a clear relationship between increased education and improved competency" (p. 125). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) also question the position that education improves performance. They state

that "educational treatment does not guarantee learning, and the acquisition of knowledge or skills does not insure that they will be applied to improved performance" (p. 241). Young (1984) does not question the importance of continuing education but recognizes that other factors are involved in performance. He states that

> it must be remembered, too, that all poor professional performance is not the result of lack of knowledge and skills. Personal problems such as chemical dependency, physical disabilities,....and the like call for other forms of remediation or discipline. (p. 120)

A third concern expressed by proponents of voluntary continuing education involves the educational program's relevancy. They question whether mandatory continuing education programs will encourage relevance of the learning program to the learner's needs. Continuing education programs should relate to an individual's job or position and mandatory requirements will not make allowances for this (Broski, 1979, p. 28). Lisman (1980) believes that most MCPE programs do not care which courses are taken as long as they are taken and that the educational programs may not even relate to one's job (p. 126).

The question of cost and resources is also prevalent when considering the issue of mandatory versus voluntary continuing professional education. A major concern is who will assume responsibility for costs incurred in the continuing education effort. It is argued that if costs are

to be borne by the participants, discrimination will exist in terms of quality of offerings. "Unless barriers to participation are removed for all, with different social and economic costs taken into account, the offers are bound to discriminate against those for whom the costs are greater" (Rockhill, 1981, p. 64). Lisman (1980) also believes that a mandatory continuing education program for professionals must seriously consider cost-effectiveness (p. 126). Major research studies have shown that in terms of participation "in general the barriers adults report as most severe are lack of time and cost" (Scanlan, 1984, p. 156). There are those, too, who believe that a compulsory continuing education program is impractical in view of the limited educational resources, especially in rural settings. There is fear that hostilities and frustration will result in those who live outside the main continuing education areas (Flaherty, 1975).

An equally important consideration is that of work and family constraints. Supporters of continuing professional education believe that MCPE has not adequately reflected on the issue of job and family responsibilities. The major concern is whether the employing institution will be responsible for setting up, incurring costs, and allowing attendance at continuing education workshops. According to Broski (1979), one of the primary obstacles to participation in continuing education programs is the lack of release time from a person's job (p. 28). Scanlan (1984) also found both

job responsibilities and family constraints were important deterrents to participation in continuing education programs (p. 164). Hoffman (1979) believes resistance to continuing education may decrease if the individual feels that a project is his own, is fully supported, and decreases present burdens (p. 32).

The final two concerns center around program quality and control. VPCE proponents fear that all too often the educational programs do not provide for quality. According to Spitzer (1979), most continuing education programs are directed toward one time workshops and seminars resulting in a "hodge-podge of content or information overload" (p. 26). In addition, MCPE does not encourage evaluation of offerings, and thus quality is decreased. As Watkins (1980) states, "We can't decide between mandatory or voluntary continuing education until we have some evaluation of performance after continuing education" (p. 16). The question of educational offering control is also a crucial one of interest to both the proponents of MCPE and VCPE. Both groups agree that the professional organization rather than an outside interest group should be in control. Killian (1980) believes that the issue of control is probably more controversial than the mandate itself (pp. 221-223).

Rockhill (1980) sees a third alternative for the dichotomy of mandatory versus voluntary continuing professional education. She recommends that

> Continuing education for professionals should be developed as a matter of public

> policy, but as a voluntary, open learning policy. This would call for voluntary, decentralized learning experiences in a wide variety of settings, maximum learner control, a comprehensive approach to personal as well as professional learning needs, accessibility for all, applicability to individual situations, and participatory planning in designing learning experiences which are wanted and needed by the intended recipients. (Rockhill, 1981, pp. 68-69)

Education would provide the opportunity for developing and maintaining competency, not the criteria for measuring it.

This stance reflects the prevalent philosophy of adult educators, i.e., continuing education is a voluntary, self-directed learning experience sought for personal development and social progress. In keeping with this philosophy, Houle (1980) recommends seven policies for continuing professional education:

1. The primary responsibility for learning should rest on the individual.
2. The goals of professional education, including those of continued learning, should be concerned with the entire process of professionalization.
3. Continuing education should be considered as part of an entrire process of learning that continues throughout the lifespan.
4. The patterns and methods of continuing education should be planned and conducted in terms of one or more of three modes of education: inquiry, instruction, and performance.
5. The provision of continuing education should expand so that it pervades all aspects of professional life.
6. Professions should collaborate on the planning and provision of continuing

education.

7. The process of recredentialing should be thoroughly rethought and redeveloped to determine the appropriate role of continuing education. (pp. 305-314)

Only by following these prescriptions can we help professionals to

> refine their sensitiveness, enlarge their conceptions, add to their knowledge, and perfect their skills so that they can discharge their responsibilities within the context of their own personalities and the needs of the society of which they are collectively a part. (Houle, 1980, p. 316)

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